



Design Review Working Group

Date: Thursday, September 24, 2020
Time: 8:30am
Location: Conducted via remote participation

Attendees: Wendy Richter, Ann Forsyth, Wynelle Evans, Alane Hodges, Pat Hanlon, Emily Innes, Phillip Hu, Jennifer Raitt, Erin Zwirko, Kelly Lynema

Minutes

1. Review minutes from 6/11/2020

Minutes were approved unanimously.

2. Summary of focus group with builders and developers

Kelly summarized the feedback from the 9/16 focus group with local builders and developers. The purpose of the focus group was to explain the project, discuss participants' reactions, and get their feedback.

Wynelle Evans asked how participants were chosen to be invited. Mike Ciampa explained that builders and developers who initiate new home construction and renovations most often were invited, but that we wanted to keep the group small to facilitate an in-depth discussion. It was also a self-selective group, as those who were interested in the Design Guidelines opted to participate.

Wynelle thought they provided interesting input, and that it highlighted how the guidelines will be perceived and how they will affect developers versus homeowners. She said she often hears concern from builders that changes like this will affect the cost of their projects, and feels that anything we can do to stress that this will have minimal financial impact will be helpful. She also noted that she is not particularly sympathetic to their concerns.

Ann Forsyth thought they made a good comment about who the audience for the guidelines is, and how this fits into our existing processes. Jennifer Raitt responded that the principles are the focus. The audience is any user—builder, owner, developer, town official who has a role in reviewing document—before, and during board review, and even those who do not go through board review. The process needs more discussion.

Emily Innes noted that the intent was that the chapter on Design Guidelines could stand alone and be accessible to any user. The rest is existing conditions and context. The intent is that the guidelines could pull out as their own document.

3. Presentation of draft Residential Design Guidelines

Emily Innes and Phillip Hu presented the draft of the chapter on Design Guidelines, noting that the intent is to provide users with a common language with which to speak about design and construction with the Town, their builders, and architects.

The principles are organized under three main categories: streetscape, building, and building element. Harriman also included definitions throughout the document so that readers are not confused with jargon. They kept the document brief intentionally so as to keep readers' attention.

4. Discussion

Ann Forsyth recommended placing the chapter on Design Guidelines up at the front of the document so readers are not overwhelmed with the front materials. She feels they could even function as two separate documents.

Ann also noted that while she really likes all the principles, A1 isn't consistent with how the others are written. She recommended looking at B1 where a sentence could be added about "make sure your consistent" or "consider the block context", and then have an "encourage" or "discourage" statement.

Ann also recommended that Harriman add a glossary to the end of the document, as some readers will skip to a specific section of the guidelines and miss an earlier definition.

Harriman requested that anyone who notices jargon in need of a definition highlight it in their review of the document.

Wynelle Evans said she loves the guidelines, and agrees with Ann that the chapter on Design Guidelines should be moved to the front of the document. She recommended addressing Ann's question about the audience at the front of the document, perhaps by adding in a pull quote from the June forum or the focus group with builders.

Ann Forsyth recommended considering modifying the introduction so it is formatted in easily digestible bulleted text like the body copy.

Wendy Richter commented that she really like the graphics and agrees with moving the guidelines up to the front of the document.

Alane Hodges commented that the document is nicely organized. She asked if there would be an opportunity to include a list of other reference documents, such as *Fine Homebuilding* or *Field Guide to American Houses*.

Wendy Richter noted that she didn't see as many recommendations for two-family homes, and wondered if there was anything else that can be done. Harriman will review and see if anything needs to be added, or if they need to call out the applicability of the other guidelines to two-family homes and single-family homes. Ann expressed concern about making it more difficult to build two-family homes, as it's a good housing type. Wendy said that showing a successful example of a two-family home would be good. Emily agreed, noting that two-family homes caused most of the comments in the survey but are the trickiest to discuss in the guidelines.

Wynelle Evans stated that she feels like Harriman has really used the input of the Working Group and is very pleased with the draft.

Pat Hanlon said he is very interested in how this will fit into existing review processes. He wondered if the group could identify places where there could be potential conflict between existing processes and this document, not just in policy but in the bylaw itself. He would hate to have the guidelines recommend that people do something that results in a lot of special permits. Emily Innes shared that the builders were concerned that guidelines would be contrary to zoning. We have assured them that they are complementary to zoning. Harriman would appreciate if working group members can point out potential conflicts between the guidelines and other policy or bylaws. Harriman and DPCD will discuss how to fit the guidelines into an existing process and bring that to the group at a future date.

Wendy Richter asked if there was any way to incentivize use of or adherence to the guidelines, such as process incentives. Pat commented that there is a different audience when you are talking about process and incentives; the process is currently onerous enough that builders are reluctant to apply for a special permit. For ordinary homeowners, the process is also onerous, but it is likely a once-in-a-lifetime process.

Ann Forsyth questioned who would get to judge whether people are conforming to the guidelines – staff? ZBA? The recommendations for the process need to be clear.

5. Next steps

Kelly Lynema provided an overview of the project timeline:

- Working group is asked to provide feedback to Kelly by Monday, 10/12. She will incorporate comments into a single document for Harriman.
- The project will be presented to the ARB at their 10/5 hearing due to scheduling conflicts resulting from Special Town Meeting. During the presentation, the team will note that the documents the ARB receives do not reflect changes from the working group.
- Harriman will revise a draft for submission as part of the package for the 10/27 ZBA hearing.
- We will hold a final community meeting in early December, ideally after Special Town Meeting but before the end of the year.
- Kelly mentioned that the working group will need to meet again, but needs to review the scope to see if Harriman has time remaining for another working group meeting. If necessary, we will meet to discuss the project and DPCD will provide feedback to Harriman.